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THE NEXT STEP IN NEW TESTAMENT STUDY

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In the textual study of the New Testament methods have been standardized and the results of critical investigation generally accepted. This is also true of linguistic study and literary criticism.

In contrast to the literary interest in the New Testament as a collection of documents there has just emerged a genuinely historical interest in first-century Christianity as a great social movement. As a result the Jewish background of primitive Christianity has been carefully studied.

But the Hellenistic environment is still waiting adequate investigation. Preliminary studies need to be made in the field of gentile religions. Early Christianity itself should be investigated from a social and genetic point of view. The varied, syncretistic life of the Graeco-Roman world provides a host of problems concerning the genesis and function of early Christianity for the New Testament student who is willing to do pioneer work.

Typical of the whole problem complex are questions concerning the hope, the present experience, the agent, and the guaranties of salvation. The developments marked in first-century Christianity show how the new movement strove to meet the needs of Gentiles in the Graeco-Roman world.

With the past achievements of New Testament scholarships we are not concerned. Our task is rather to canvass the leading characteristics of present day research and indicate where the largest possibilities for advance are to be found. It is an impressive fact that in certain important lines of investigation still in vogue, work has been standardized and results generally accepted. This is notably true in the case of textual, linguistic, and literary criticism.

I. STANDARDIZED TYPES OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDY

In textual criticism the broad foundations laid by Westcott and Hort and their predecessors remain firm, being altered in particulars but not in essentials. True the evidence of the Freer Codex in Washington needs to be called into court and comprehensively examined. Von Soden's critical edition of the Greek New Testament, executed on such a magnificent scale, should be evaluated properly. New manuscript evi-

dence is eagerly awaited. But the real battle of scholarship in the textual criticism of the New Testament is over and won. No student would dream of pursuing his studies in this field without using a Westcott and Hort or some equally critical text.

Similarly in the linguistic study of the New Testament critical scholarship has already made its case. It was not so long since that scholars were still in the dogmatic period of New Testament philology. Then the language of the New Testament was regarded as a peculiar variety of Greek, especially designed to convey the message of the new Christian religion. Before the close of the last century, however, a great "Light from the Ancient East" broke on the scholarly world. It came from the rubbish heaps of Egypt where Flinders Petrie, Grenfell, and Hunt discovered great numbers of papyrus fragments both literary and non-literary, both public and private. Deissmann, in working over these materials, recognized the fact that the New Testament was written in precisely the vernacular of these documents. This discovery exploded once for all the theory of "Biblical Greek" as a peculiar language. Non-classical elements in the New Testament which scholars had long regarded as Semitisms or Hebraisms were found to be common coin in the Hellenistic Greek of the period. Because of the abundance of the new materials there remains a seemingly endless amount of work to be done in the field of language study. New Cremers and Thayers and Weiners are needed; but the way is cleared for this work. It is demonstrated that the language of the New Testament is the *Koine* Greek, the international language of the Graeco-Roman world.

A third group of problems widely discussed in recent years have been literary in character; problems of genuineness, authorship, integrity, and literary structure. These questions have focused themselves in general around three centers, Pauline, Synoptic, and Johannine. By common consent the

Synoptic problem has been given primacy. Ever since Harnack's work in reconstructing Q, the two-source theory may be said to have held the field. But it is a healthy sign of the vigor of present day New Testament scholarship that these results have been strongly attacked and a multiple source hypothesis erected in place of the more simple but less adequate theory. The tantalizing possibility of a discovery which may alter our whole Synoptic problem ever lurks in the agreements of Matthew and Luke against Mark, yet the possibility seems slight with the data and methods at hand. A new methodology for handling the whole problem must be developed. Since the Synoptic Gospels were themselves the product of the gentile mission it is but natural to expect the development of a new technique from a genuinely historical study of the needs and requirements of that mission. The problem demands an altogether more human and less documentary treatment than it has yet received.

Some progress has also been made with the nexus of literary problems centering around the name of Paul. It is no longer thought necessary to defend the usage of the expression "Pauline letters." Of course difficulties still exist throughout the Pauline field. Are Philippians and Second Corinthians a unit? What is the relation between Colossians and the so-called Ephesian epistle? Are there Pauline elements in the Pastorals? Concerning such problems as these, however, two generalizations may be in place. They are not crucial questions which demand settlement at the expense of more acute difficulties. Moreover, their solution depends to a marked degree on an increased knowledge of the situations which gave rise to these letters. The more a student knows about the environs of the Pauline mission and the problems faced by Christian propagandists in the post-Pauline period, the better will he be able to handle this complex of difficulties.

In the Johannine field events have moved rapidly in recent years. Beginning with the traditional position that Gospel,

Epistles, and Apocalypse were all by the same author, and he the apostle John, scholarship has gone all the way to a denial of apostolic authorship for each and all and a repudiation of common authorship so far as Gospel and Apocalypse are concerned. In the case of the Apocalypse historical criticism has won its spurs by the singularly successful manner in which it has located the work in its Asian environment, collocated it in relation to other examples of apocalyptic literature and interpreted its words in the lurid light of the last decade of the first century. It is to be regretted, however, that similar methods have not been applied in the case of the Gospel. This remarkable book has not yet been studied in its native habitat except in a very cursory manner. What do we know about philosophical mysticism in the Graeco-Roman world at the turn of the first Christian centuries? Vastly more important than to know the name of the author or his method of literary composition is to know the deep religious experience out of which the Fourth Gospel grew.

Although literary, linguistic, and textual problems remain, technique has become more or less standardized in these fields of research and achieved results have, in general, been accepted. The remaining problems are either not of strategic importance or else demand a new methodology.

II. HISTORICAL INTEREST IN JEWISH ENVIRONMENT

In sharp contrast to the literary and documentary study of Christian scripture a new type of interest has been emerging in recent years which we may characterize as historical. Today the New Testament student looks upon himself not merely as the interpreter of a literature, but as the historian of a social movement. For the historian all the literary remains of the period he is investigating are significant. Hence there has been among New Testament students of the immediate past, a marked enthusiasm for studying the Jewish literature of the inter-Testamental and early Christian periods. Today

it is generally recognized that a knowledge of these contemporary Jewish documents and the life that produced them is essential to proper equipment for New Testament study.

On the whole the area of late Judaism has been well worked. The important source materials are accessible both in critical editions and translations. Here the *magnum opus* of the last generation was R. H. Charles' edition of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. This stupendous work makes available for English students the Jewish books which, after the canon, were most popular at the beginning of our era and were probably most nearly representative of contemporary Jewish thought. Together with Philo and Josephus these writings successfully bridge the chasm between the Old and New Testaments.

It is to Josephus that students have turned for a record of the political events amid which Christianity arose. They have found his voluminous works a mine of information not only concerning political history, but also concerning the social, intellectual, and religious life of the time as well. In the case of Josephus both textual and translational materials are adequate.

Unfortunately this cannot be said of the extensive works of Philo, which record most clearly the ethical, philosophical, and religious influence of Hellenism on extra-Palestinian Judaism. It is to be regretted that Cohn and Wendland's critical text of Philo is not matched by a modern English translation. Our standard translation of this most important Jewish writer is already over sixty years old.

It is a safe generalization that these source materials have been well utilized for a reconstruction of contemporary Jewish thought and life. The history of the Jewish people during this period has been fully and authoritatively set forth by Schürer in a monumental work. Also briefer, but valuable manuals, notably those of Holtzmann and Bousset, supplement Schürer in important ways.

The apocalyptic background of late Judaism has been investigated with extraordinary care. At this point the application of Jewish materials to the study of early Christianity has been unusually complete. As a result Christianity is shown to be the flowering of Jewish apocalypticism. What is needed in this whole area is a utilization of all available information concerning late Judaism, equally thoroughgoing with the use that has been made of Jewish Apocalyptic. This is not merely a Palestinian problem, but one that concerns Hellenistic Judaism as well. For example, the importance of Philo's writings for an interpretation of that other Jew of the Diaspora, Paul the Tarsian, has scarcely yet been estimated.

The one place in the Jewish field where there is most likelihood of progress in the immediate future lies in the area of Rabbinic studies. It is a fact that one of the most promising and most neglected source books for this period is the Mishna, though it dates roughly from 200 A.D. Obviously the difficulty is to differentiate between the materials that are early and those that are late. But Jewish scholars particularly are alive to the problem. They are concerned not merely to make the rabbinic sources available but also to evaluate their contents; for there are many Jewish scholars who maintain that the best sources for a knowledge of Judaism even in New Testament times are to be found in the earlier portions of the Talmud. The thorough investigation and evaluation of the rabbinic tradition is, therefore, the capital problem of the present in the field of contemporary Judaism.

Besides the critical rabbinic question there are many minor problems such as the relative significance of Palestinian and non-Palestinian Judaism for the study of the developing Christian movement; the reaction of Hellenistic Judaism on the religion of the homeland; the syncretistic character of late Judaism, Palestinian as well as extra-Palestinian. Such problems as these, however, call into view another set of environmental influences, those emanating from the gentile world.

Indeed the very reasons which impelled students to investigate the Jewish environment of early Christianity lead inevitably to research in the gentile background as well.

III. A NEW FIELD OF RESEARCH THE GENTILE ENVIRONMENT

The insufficiencies already noted in the lines of study most pursued during the past generation all point in one direction, toward the gentile environment of early Christianity. For the most part mooted questions lead directly toward this field. Apparently long-expected solutions are waiting just around the corner in the milieu of the first-century Graeco-Roman world.

The study of this gentile background needs no *apologia*. Rather the New Testament itself forces it upon our attention. The very language in which the books of the New Testament were written tells of the life of the times in every sentence; it speaks the language of the common people in the Graeco-Roman world. This much the discoveries of Grenfell and Hunt and the researches of Deissmann have proved to us. Moreover these very human documents were produced in a gentile environment and for purposes of gentile propaganda. Thus the studies in introduction during the past generation have located them. The fact that the Christian scripture was written in *Koine* Greek and for a gentile public compels the consideration of Christianity's Hellenistic environment.

It is true that something has already been done in these rich gentile fields. Historians have given us in broad outline and in detail a view of the political, economic, and social life of the times. Thanks to the untiring labors of Greek and Latin scholars the classical background is filled in with minuteness. This is especially true in the field of classical philosophy and literature. Unfortunately, however, these abundant materials are not largely useful for the study of the developing Christian religion. In the popular thought of the first-century

world Homer and Hesiod were far away in the dim past, Aeschylus and Sophocles were all but forgotten, while Platonism and Aristotelianism were matters for the schools. For a knowledge of the popular philosophies of Epicureanism and Stoicism New Testament students are indebted to their collaborators in the philosophy department. Other types of popular Hellenistic philosophy are largely ignored, and in the field of the popular religions the ground has been barely broken. The religious significance of emperor worship has perhaps received most adequate treatment. But the really important factors, the popular mystery cults of the day, have been inadequately considered. General works on this subject are few; hence the publications of Toutain and Loisy become greatly enhanced in value. Farnell and Jane Harrison have made the Greek religions of redemption more familiar than the oriental mysteries. Here and there isolated cults have been singled out for extended treatment as in the case of Cumont's "Mysteries of Mithras."

Christianity's relation to the mysteries has generally received a much abbreviated treatment. Certain German scholars of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* have given serious consideration to the problems involved and in circumscribed areas of research have demonstrated how the religious experiences of Gentiles may be used to make the New Testament live again. English and American scholars, on the other hand, have generally been inclined to dismiss as inconsiderable the possibility of gentile influences; though in fairness such significant titles as *The Evolution of Early Christianity* by Case, *The Earlier Epistles of St. Paul* by Lake, and Professor Morgan's refreshing treatment of the *Religion and Theology of Paul* should be noted as specific exceptions to this statement. By far the majority of English scholars, however, have ranged themselves on the side of Kennedy and are willing to admit only the most formal interrelations.

Thus a wide and varied field of investigation lies open before scholarship in the study of the gentile background to early Christianity. To state the matter in comprehensive terms, there is demand for a great work which shall do for the Hellenistic environment what Schürer and Bousset have done for late Judaism. Such a compendium would, of course, be as diversified in character as the wide variety of interests represented in the syncretistic life of the Graeco-Roman world. With materials easily available this work would be well nigh unmanageable; and with the studied neglect of the Hellenistic field by students in other departments such a work is impossible for the present.

As a necessary preliminary much spade work is required. To cite a typical instance of neglected investigation which demands immediate attention; the whole important area of Hellenistic mysticism, so necessary for an understanding of Pauline and Johannine Christianity, has fallen between the students of philosophy and the students of religion and been ignored by both. We know little of Orphism and less of neo-Pythagoreanism. Concerning pre-Christian Gnosticism and the beginnings of neo-Platonism there are scanty materials available. Yet it is a fact that these very systems, together with oriental astrology and speculation were influential factors in the thought life of the Graeco-Roman world. Like Stoicism and Epicureanism they functioned as religions in the lives of many. Unlike these more respected philosophies, however, they represent the reaction toward supernaturalism which characterized the revival of religion at the beginning of the Christian era and of which Christianity itself was an expression. To investigate the philosophical mysticism of the gentile world is an alluring task with not superabundant source materials.

More important still there are special studies needed in the sphere of Hellenistic religions. It is the popular syncretistic

religions of the age that concern us here, particularly these of oriental origin. Our information relative to the cults emanating from Syria and Cilicia is scanty and chaotic, although a knowledge of them is of the utmost importance for an understanding of Paul and his mission. Of the religions which flourished on the Phoenician coast, and in Babylonia and the Phrygian highlands there is also a great lack of information. Even Persian Mithraism and the Egyptian cult of Isis are none too familiar to modern students. Also there are special topics such as the relation of religion and morality in the gentile world, the function of prayer, the operations of revelation, religious healing, magic and exorcism and kindred subjects. Each of these furnishes an opportunity for pioneer work in research.

Moreover, much work that has already been done is not adequate for historical purposes. Mystery religions, which have been accorded notably generous treatment, have not been investigated in accordance with modern historical methodology. Such a significant production as M. Cumont's book on Mithraism is primarily a descriptive work on the basis of literary and archaeological remains. It tells the *what* but not the *why*. It ignores the simple fact that back of the literary remains or the cult monument is the group life that produced the monument—the throbbing religious experiences of real men in reaction to their particular environment. A religion always exists before it comes to literary expression or erects its monuments. It is this life back of the documents that interests the modern historian, the social process involved, not the statistics.

For the student of religion, then, the final factor is not the document, but the social movement which gave rise to the document. Now the group life of any period is at best a very complex affair and to be understood it must be viewed as a part of an on-going social process, receiving its constituent elements from the past and making its contribution to the

future. When any religion is thus viewed as a part of continuous process a specific knowledge of the causal nexus producing the phenomena in question becomes a factor of supreme importance. Indeed it is one of the canons of the modern historical science that no item can be understood without a knowledge of its genetic relationships. Accordingly in studying the mystery cults, the student should minutely investigate the life of the times in order to isolate the influences which gave shape to these religions. The vital interests dominant at that time, the means at hand for the satisfaction of those interests, the physical stimuli of habitat and climate, the course of political events, the economic interests involved, and a host of other social motivations should be considered among the contributory factors.

To collect and order all these items would seem an impossible task for one man; but assistance is available from co-workers in other departments. The anthropologist is prepared to disclose the unscientific presuppositions of the primitive type of mind. The sociologist is ready to analyze the social interests and motivations represented, while the psychologist is alert to examine the mental phenomena involved and show what desires are gratified. In the case of the mysteries where extraordinary religious experiences were much in evidence the services of the psychologist become particularly valuable. Indeed the student of religion should scorn no aid that will better enable him to understand the genesis and the functional significance of these religious movements. A mere description on the basis of literary remains is insufficient. To be understood these movements require the application of the scientific methods employed in the field of general history.

Not only are the Hellenistic religions of redemption waiting to be investigated from a social and genetic point of view but Christianity itself stands in need of such examination. It is only within the last half-century that scholars have learned to think of Christianity in terms of vital religious experience

instead of static quantities of doctrine, ritual, or practice. By their very fixity of form documents tend to encourage the latter view. Hence it is not strange that New Testament scholars have been peculiarly susceptible to a static conception of their own religion. Today, however, when the notion of progressive development in human experience has become axiomatic it is impossible to escape the conviction that the Christian religion itself is developmental in character and that the writers of the New Testament were real men who lived in vital contact with their environment.

This extension of the developmental conception of history to the field of religious experience calls into view the social processes which gave rise to the New Testament documents. It focuses the attention not on the Christian scriptures but on the men and women who constituted the personnel of the Christian movement. Back of the records of the apostolic age stand Jesus and his apostles and the rank and file of the Christian communities, real men living in constant, intimate, and vital contact with the social order of their day. Out of their personal reactions to their social environment they developed their religion. Accordingly an adequate investigation of the phenomena presented by primitive Christianity demands that the student penetrate back of the New Testament documents to the religious living of individuals and communities which gave rise to that literature.

The appreciation of the social and developmental character of Christianity, however, makes certain very large demands on the New Testament student. It requires that he give the most minute attention to the environment of primitive Christianity in order to understand the dominant social forces which fashioned the new movement. Roughly speaking primitive Christianity was composed of two factors: the Jewish heritage plus the gentile environment. The political and social background of early Christianity was Hellenistic from the first. This was the case even in Palestine where

political and social developments were strongly influenced by foreign forces. Of more immediate concern are the religious influences which played upon the youthful movement; for Christianity grew up in a very religious world. A great revival was the order of the day. In the gentile field the new religion had to compete with vigorous and popular cults. Christian missionaries came into intimate contact with these groups. To be understood in their propaganda they had to use the religious vocabulary and thought forms of the Hellenistic world.

Just as soon as the first gentile convert was obtained, and that was early, the gentile environment itself became a heritage. By the middle of the first century the converts to Christianity were, in large numbers, proselytes from Paganism. Those who had been adherents of other faiths brought with them a fresh accession of religious experience. The interests and desires which had made them "God-fearers" or initiates now prompted their adherence to the Christian movement. The satisfactions which they had previously sought in popular philosophy and syncretistic cult they now sought in the Christian religion. To meet these practical demands the Christian movement experienced distinct modification as the records of the apostolic age amply attest. In this way a new gentile heritage, moral, intellectual, and religious became a vital part of Christianity. Hence the importance of studying the youthful Christian movement in relation to the total background of Hellenistic life in all its varied aspects—social, economic, and political—as well as specifically religious.

IV. TYPICAL PROBLEMS IN THE GENTILE FIELD

When the New Testament is thus studied from a social and genetic point of view a host of important problems make their appearance and clamor for solution. These difficulties are so numerous and varied that only three or four typical instances may be cited more or less at random.

One such question concerns the kind of hope which the Christian movement offered to the earnest seekers for salvation in the first-century world. Primitive Christianity began its career as a reformed Jewish Messianism. The apocalypticism of the Jerusalem group did not make allowance for personal immortality. Only those among the Jews who accepted Jesus as the apocalyptic Messiah would be eligible for the Kingdom of God. This kingdom was soon to come here on earth and would be populated by those who were still alive. The primitive Christian hope, then, was clearly a national affair, though it was very limited in its scope.

In sharp contrast to this very narrow conception of a messianic kingdom here on earth, the contemporary gentile cults offered to their initiates the hope of a blessed immortality in the future. This hope was as markedly individualistic in character as the Jewish and primitive Christian ideas were nationalistic. The individual man, whatever his race, might look forward with confidence to a happy future when once he was initiated into the cult. Immediately after death this blessed state would be realized.

In the New Testament we find Christian ideas on this subject in process of transformation. Paul carried over the Jewish apocalypticism but clearly modified it. He assured the Thessalonians that the dead would be raised to enjoy the Kingdom and he had much to say to the Corinthians concerning the resurrection body. Moreover he offered the hope of a salvation, not on the nationalistic basis of membership in the Jewish race but on the individualistic basis of membership in the Christian cult. This was the whole point of the Jerusalem crisis, and the Galatian controversy. In the Gospel of John we have a further development where the blessed dead are given place in heaven immediately after death. Thus the Christian movement made the transition from narrow nationalistic hope of a Kingdom of God on earth to the potentially universal hope of a blessed immortality in heaven. When

did this transition begin, and whence came the stimuli which brought it about? The obvious inference is that they came from the gentile environment.

A second and similar group of questions are suggested by the consideration of salvation as a matter of present experience. Although the Jewish Christians of the primitive community were living with their thoughts concentrated on the future in daily expectation of the return of Jesus, yet they were conscious of a vivid present experience of salvation. They lived an ecstatic life and their special spiritual endowments they regarded as the mark of divine favor. In anticipation of the appearance of the Messiah they interpreted their *charismata* as premonitory signs of the coming of the new age and a preparation for its advent.

The experience of gentile religionists was not less vivid. In the more orgiastic cults the frenzied worshipers felt themselves possessed by the God. Inspired by the wine of the deity they became literally enthusiastic (*entheos* "full of God"). In the more refined of the mystery religions the initiates experienced an emotional exultation as they watched the unfolding of the mystery drama. However it might be induced the psychological uplift which resulted from participation in the rites of initiation was interpreted as the beginning of a new divine life. The initiate was *renatus in aeternum*. He had become "God from man." The gentile world of the first century was rich in mystical experiences of this type. They ranged all the way from the crass physical emotionalism of the Dionysian cult or the Cybele-Attis mysteries to the highly attenuated mental emotion of Hermetism.

Now it is a striking fact that the Pauline letters record a wealth of mystical religious experience. Paul himself was subject to ecstasies which he interpreted in mystical terminology. He wrote of the inception of the Christian life as a complete re-creation. This experience, he told the Galatians, was the only thing that mattered. The man who had passed

through such a transformation was no longer the material man but a spiritual man; for he had dwelling within him the spirit of God himself, or what for Paul was equivalent, the spirit of Christ. Paul's conception of the Christian life was most comprehensively summarized in the simple formula "To be in Christ"; yet in this brief expression Paul contemplated a most intimate and realistic union between the spiritual Christ and the believer. This was the main element in Paul's thought of salvation as a present process. On the realistic basis furnished by his idea of the indwelling spirit he built up his splendid ethical system; for the fruits of the spirit were but the outward expression of the inner life. Here then we have one of the earliest Christian missionaries presenting the new religion as a matter of vital union with the living Lord of the community. This was at the middle of the first century. At the end of that century we find this Christ mysticism much intensified in the Johannine type of religious experience, where salvation is viewed as the present sharing of a divine life mediated to men by the Son.

The impressive factors in the situation are as follows: On the one hand the Jewish heritage of Christianity was essentially unmystical. On the other, the gentile environment of Christianity shows the heights and the depths of religious mysticism. This is the antithesis. The Hegelian synthesis follows quite logically. Both Pauline and Johannine Christianity were essentially mystical in character. How are we to account for the strain of mysticism which appeared in first-century Christianity if not on the basis of Hellenistic influences?

The transformation of the early Christian idea of the agent of salvation presents a third problem complex. For the Jerusalem community Jesus was the apocalyptic Messiah who had been inducted into his heavenly office by resurrection from the dead and was shortly to come on clouds of glory to usher in the Kingdom of God on earth. Their prayer was *Maranatha*, "Our Lord, Come!" In the thought of the

primitive Christian community Jesus was the realization of the Jewish ideal of the Messiah.

The saviors of the Gentiles were very different beings. Normally they were gods or heroes who had vicariously suffered death and then had risen again. By their triumph over death they guaranteed salvation to their devotees. Such a god was Dionysus, the nature-deity of the Thracians, whose death and resurrection were memorialized in the passion dramas of Greece. Adonis was another redeemer-god, and his death, resurrection, and ascension were regularly celebrated each year at Byblos in Syria. Osiris too had suffered a violent death and later had been restored to life; and his experiences were an earnest of the bliss which awaited the virtuous on the Plains of Aalu. These deities were not only dying and rising saviors, but they were the living and present lords of worshiping communities, the cult brotherhoods which were scattered all over the Hellenistic world. Such religious groups belonged to their lord. They were under his protection; and even here on earth they enjoyed a foretaste of the blessed life of the future.

According to the New Testament the primitive Christian conception of Jesus' Messiahship underwent notable change in the gentile world. In the earliest gospel records, represented by the Q or *logia* materials, the death and resurrection of Jesus are not mentioned. Mark, on the other hand, devotes half his Gospel to the narration of these events. Paul, in his preaching, "placarded" the sufferings and death of Jesus before the imagination of his gentile audiences in as vivid a manner as the initiation ritual portrayed the passion of the Savior-God. He assured the Corinthians that even as Jesus had risen from the dead, those who were united with Christ would share in the resurrection. The spiritual Christ was also the living Lord of the community and the very essence of the Christian life was to live in the most vital and intimate union with Christ. In the Fourth Gospel the Messiah concept is further

transformed. Here Jesus is the pre-existent heavenly Logos, the giver of life and the mediator of knowledge. Whence came all these strange ideas so foreign to the Jewish thought of a Messiah? The clear parallels at hand in the gentile world suggest the answer to this question.

The rites of the early Christians present a fourth series of interesting questions. Even the Jerusalem group had initiatory rites. But their baptism was like that of John. It signified reconsecration rather than regeneration. Their Lord's Supper was at once a memorial and an anticipation. It recalled the last supper of Jesus with his disciples and it looked forward to the great banquet in the messianic kingdom. For hundreds of years the gentile world had also been familiar with initiation ceremonies. They consisted mainly of ablutions. These rites were believed to purify the candidates who died to their old life and arose to a new. The sacred meal also figured prominently in the gentile cults. At the table of his lord the devotee partook of food which engendered and nourished in him the divine life. Sacramental communion with the god by means of eating and drinking was a characteristic feature of the mysteries. The meal might be orgiastic as in the Dionysian cult, or well-ordered as in Mithraism.

Paul's letters are the record of a reinterpretation of the primitive Christian rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper. He leaves out of view entirely the early messianic significance of these ceremonies. For him baptism is significant because it marks the consummation of the believer's union with his Lord. It unites all men, Jews and Gentiles, into the mystical body of Christ. In baptism men die with Christ and arise again in newness of life. Thus baptism becomes a realistic guaranty of the desired union with the risen Lord.

In a similar vein Paul interpreted the Lord's Supper to the Corinthian Christians as a communion of the body and blood of Christ. Not only was the Lord's Supper commemorative

in Paul's thought but it operated to strengthen and nourish the spiritual life of the believer. Whenever he spoke of these rites Paul always emphasized their importance and significance. In giving them a sacramentarian turn he satisfied the demands of the Gentiles for realistic guaranties of salvation.

The author of the Fourth Gospel insisted upon the rites of baptism and the Lord's Supper even more vigorously than Paul did. Unless a man was born of water and spirit he could not be saved. Unless he eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man he could not have eternal life. Even with the intellectualized Johannine conception of salvation these sacramental instruments were insisted upon as indispensable. Thus the New Testament documents testify to a sacramentarian tendency within first-century Christianity which was integrated with the items of mystical experience already noted.

The parallels for this collocation of sacramental rites and mystical experiences are to be found in Hellenistic religions of redemption. It is difficult to avoid the inference that the two sets of phenomena were closely related. Since the gentile religions were on the field first we must look for the genesis of these tendencies in Christianity's Hellenistic environment. The psychological process whereby the Christian movement became heir to this gentile heritage is worthy of investigation by a master mind.

A large variety of similar problems, all of them of the utmost importance for an understanding of the beginnings of Christianity, might be suggested. The four just mentioned, however, which concern the hope, the experience, the agent, and the guaranties of salvation are typical of the whole problem complex. Taken together they present in one view this striking situation. On the one hand, we have an environment in which popular religions guaranteed the hope of a blessed immortality and the mystical experience of union with a dying and rising Savior-God by means of initiatory rites which featured ablutions and sacred meals. On the other

hand, there is a youthful and developing Christianity which offered salvation to the Gentiles as a future hope and a vivid present experience of union with Christ guaranteed by baptism and the Lord's Supper. The parallels are too impressive to be ignored. They show that Christianity, like the gentile religions, was sensitive and responsive to the vital needs of the day in the Graeco-Roman world. But what, fundamentally, were the social forces which caused these striking developments? When did they become operative on Christianity? How did they make themselves felt? To what extent did the new religion satisfy the demands put upon it? What precisely were the interrelations of similar phenomena in Christian and pagan religions? These are problems which require the most discriminating investigation.

Of course, this is not the only type of New Testament study that is needed at the present time. Advances must be made all along the line. But the critical problems of the present lie in the Hellenistic environment of early Christianity. Here the questions are of strategic importance just because the field is comparatively unworked and offers uncalculated possibilities for fresh discovery. It is the open door before New Testament scholarship today. Beyond are the unoccupied areas which lure the pioneering spirit.